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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 001715

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MTS

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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [PGOV](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: PHILIPPINE MILITARY LAUNCHES MAJOR STRIKE AGAINST
BASILAN TERRORISTS

REF: A. MANILA 1468 (LAST ICRC HOSTAGE EUGENIO VAGNI
RELEASED)

[B.](#) MANILA 1261 (OPERATIONS UNDERSCORE MILITARY'S
PRIORITIES)

[C.](#) MANILA 1063 (MINDANAO VIOLENCE RISING)

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, reasons 1.4 (a) and (b).

[11.](#) (S) SUMMARY: The Philippine military struck hard August 12 and 13 against Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) terrorists on the violence-ridden island of Basilan in the southern Philippines, and appears to have killed more than 20 terrorists in an aggressive -- but costly -- operation. Unconfirmed reports received by U.S. forces in the southern Philippines assert the operations resulted in the deaths of at least five high-value targets, but over two dozen soldiers were killed, and at least a dozen wounded. The Basilan governor grieved the loss of so many soldiers in her province, and expressed concern for civilian populations that may have been affected by the offensive. The operation stems from a renewed push by the government to address a resurgence of ASG violence throughout the Sulu archipelago (ref C), where ASG terrorists have kidnapped and killed civilians and abducted -- but later released -- three International Committee of the Red Cross workers (ref A). With the Red Cross abduction resolved and a new ceasefire with Mindanao's separatist Muslim rebels in place, the military may be turning its attention and resources to the national security priorities outlined to the Ambassador in June by the military's top general (ref B), potentially marking a return to the more aggressive anti-terrorism policies of earlier years of President Arroyo's administration and more focused anti-terrorism operations in the field. END SUMMARY.

OPERATION ELIMINATES ASG TARGETS

[12.](#) (S) Reports received by the U.S. Joint Special Operations Task Force Philippines (JSOTF-P) asserted that operations late on August 12 and into the following morning killed approximately 20 Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) terrorists and affiliated members, including three ASG members and two Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) rebels believed to be ASG associates. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Western Mindanao Command reported the unconfirmed death of a key ASG figure on Basilan, Khair Mundos, and Moton Indama, brother of ASG sub-leader Furaji Indama. The operation also reportedly caused the deaths of MILF separatist rebels Johnny Poy and Asid Sali. The military's offensive faced heavy resistance by the ASG and resulted in the deaths of at least 27 soldiers and 13 wounded, a heavy price. However, the deaths of these terrorists and their associates, if confirmed, will have dealt a significant blow to ASG capabilities and could stem several months of resurgent violence by the terrorist group. In recent months, the

people of Basilan and Jolo witnessed several kidnappings and murders by ASG terrorists (ref C), in addition to the high-profile ASG kidnapping of three International committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) workers, the last of whom was finally released July 12 by his captors on the island of Jolo (ref A).

BASILAN GOVERNOR GRIEVING LOSS OF SOLDIERS

13. (C) Basilan Governor Jum Akbar told Post in an August 13 phone call she was deeply saddened by the large number of soldiers who had died in operation in her province. The military's success against the ASG, while important, was little consolation. Akbar noted that Basilan was starting to recover from the endemic violence that had limited economic and social development on the island for so long, but this recent offensive proved to be a painful reminder of the perennial potential for violence. While she said she understood that military operations would be planned and undertaken without her knowing, she nonetheless expressed hope that the island would, one day, have an opportunity to encounter peace. Akbar instructed her vice governor this morning to look into the operation's effects on civilian populations, and indicated she would likely remain in Basilan for the approaching Ramadan period to attend to the needs of the island.

RENEWED FOCUS ON FIGHTING ASG

14. (C) Recent political successes by the Arroyo administration have contributed to conditions allowing the

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AFP to focus on the ASG threat. The July 12 release of the last of three ICRC hostages on Jolo island permitted the AFP to reallocate its resources away from rescue operations toward a more offensive posture. The Arroyo administration's July 23 ceasefire with MILF rebels and a subsequent July 29 joint statement by both parties on resuming the peace process similarly enabled the AFP to suspend some operations against rogue MILF commanders in central Mindanao, freeing resources and manpower for other operations. Combined with President Arroyo's order for the military to address internal security threats, as described in June to the Ambassador (ref B), these developments together appear to have helped increase the ability of the AFP to undertake offensive operations against the ASG.

COMMENT

15. (C) If the deaths of the high value targets can be confirmed, this operation will be a significant blow to the ASG's capabilities on Basilan and, more generally, in Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. But even if successful by that measure, the operation will have proved costly for the AFP in terms of lives; more soldiers died than terrorists, according to early figures. Still, the operation may portend the Philippines' return to more aggressive anti-terrorism tactics, which had become less prevalent in recent years, marking the government's determination to tackle the continued threat of terrorism in the final nine months of President Arroyo's term in office.

KENNEY